

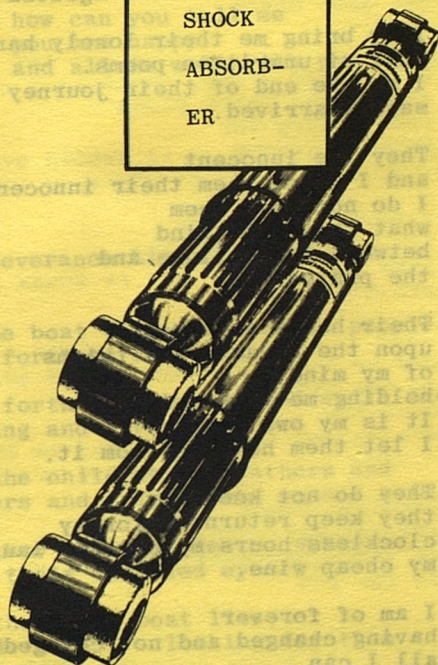
JOYCE

ODAM'S

SHOCK

ABSORB-

ER



Madam Pride

I am vain hag
from original time.
All men have grown younger
than I.
Their eyes turn toward girls

except
when I look at them
in a deep religious way
then they
amazed
stare back at me with ageless love.

They bring me their lonely hands
full of unwritten poems.
I am the end of their journey
safely arrived.

They are innocent
and I allow them their innocence.
I do not tell them
what they will find
between the failure and
the praise.

Their hands are frozen
upon the breasts and thighs
of my mind,
holding me from dying.
It is my own dying.
I let them hold me from it.

They do not know why
they keep returning for my
clockless hours my certain laughter
my cheap wine.

I am of forever
having changed and not changed
all I can
knowing what I know
and knowing
there is much yet
to discover.

Letter From The Closet

out of your letter
comes the mustiness
of where you are

smoke and dampness
rise heavily
from the envelope

i know you now
in a dark place
full of stale existence

how can you tell me
you are happy
and all is well with you

The Severance Line

oh the boat with its endless people
goes forth to drown

goes forth to tip over and spill them
gasping and thrashing down

all the children and fathers and
mothers and friends who cannot swim

look how they dazzle the water
with their startled eyes

and there the boat lies
upside down looking for them

and the water stares quietly back
growing sleepy in the sun

House, Growing Old

he knows the house
knows all its rooms and
what the creakings mean
within the walls

he has been
under the house
crawling around in
the damp earth

helping it brace itself
fixing its water pipes
and looking for
termite danger

a leak slides down
the corner of a room
from the
all night rain

now he is crawling around
in the attic
over the
wiring and insulation

calling: house house
are you all right
is there anything i can
do for you

Reborn Center For Holistic Health
Birthday Poem At Twenty One

my child i have sent you my worry
on blank and wrinkled paper

you are a man now
you can release yourself

i will not be the burden you
are strong enough to carry

look for the symbol here
it is a gift for your birthday

i have hidden it in a smile because i
do not know how to tell you what it is

it is not a cigarette or a drink
or a knock at the door

it is something that aches
at the back of my head

i put my hand where it is and
it is no longer yours

do you understand your mother?
her strange love? her thoughts that

stop in the middle?
then good, we will leave it at that,

have a nice life

Lemon Center For Hot Buttered Roll

you are right
about the woman
she is
taller than
your love for her
her impossible smile
flows down upon you as though
it were a sunrise

do not murmur her name
too soon
she does not
know it

she is preparing an
avocado for
your breakfast
you must love it or
she will cry

do not call her anger
she will kill the
spider you have
trained to watch her from
your serious eye

she will grow
fat
when you please her
sing songs for her in
your borrowing voice

she will listen and
write you a poem
and never
read it
to you

Late September Poem

i, not beautiful,
not sad,
sit at my table
naked in the morning

the windows are cool
and open
no one is looking in

i might
sit this way forever
looking at the nothing
of the wall

i might sit here
till midnight
or till the telephone
or doorbell makes me move

i love the contour of
the chair
the wood-feel
beneath my elbows

i am not thirsty
or hungry
or lonely

i am
sitting here

The Newspaper Tells It

-- for John Berryman

poet in icy river

kills self

poet in river kills

icy poet

river in poet

self river

river kills poet

in icy self

kills poet

self poet

icy

kills river

poet

in river

poet kills self

in icy river

-- Joyce Odam

Sacramento, CA